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SUBJECT: MALIKI CALLS FOR DOWNSIZING IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (S) During the weekly Iraqi National Security Council (NSC) meeting on July 13, Prime Minister Maliki called for an immediate freeze in the growth of Iraqi security forces and ordered development of a plan to reduce numbers. MinDef Abdel Qadr and Commander of Joint Forces (CHOD) General Babakir were able to partially push back Maliki's proposal. Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I) Commanding General Petraeus strongly urged the Prime Minister to restrain the impulse to reduce the size of Iraqi Security Forces, noting decreasing numbers of Coalition Forces and a still fragile security environment.

2. (S) Summary continued. National Security Advisor (NSA) Rubaie then turned to a review of military command authorities, but this provoked a public disagreement between the MinDef and the CHOD. The Prime Minister diffused the tense atmosphere by asking NSA Rubaie to provide additional information and recommendations prior to re-consideration by the NSC. The Iraqi Attorney General delivered a sobering report about an increasing number of assassinations of Iraqi judges. The Prime Minister approved an offer by IntMin Bolani to increase the size and capabilities of protective details as well as open up additional housing in protected areas. The Ministry of Defense Director General for Intelligence and Security gave a detailed briefing on dynamic funding sources for al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). He praised international efforts against their foreign bank accounts and noted AQI was turning to stealing oil and oil products as a primary source of income. MinDef Abdel Qadr assessed this as an opportunity and called for a coordinated intelligence-operations effort to attack this funding source. End Summary.

Maliki Wants to Downsize Iraqi Security Forces Now

3. (S) During the weekly Iraqi NSC meeting, in a discussion about the dangers of the militarization of Iraqi society led by NSA Rubaie, Prime Minister Maliki called for an immediate freeze in the expansion of security forces beyond their current peak. He also ordered the Ministries of Interior and Defense to develop a plan for reducing total numbers of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) as soon as possible. Maliki added that in a year's time, Iraq would not need such a large force. While acknowledging recent successful military operations, he claimed these campaigns had rendered death blows to both Al-Qaida and Jaysh-al Mahdi Special Groups (JAM-SG), making large numbers of ISF redundant. Citing Turkey in particular, he noted that most other democratic countries have a very low police-to-population ratio. He concluded that it was time to refocus government funds away from security towards job creation programs.

¶4. (S) Both MinDef Abdel Qadr and Commander of Joint Forces (CHOD) Babakir appeared surprised by the PM's comments and respectfully pushed back. The MinDef noted that unlike many of the other countries cited by Maliki, Iraq had been engulfed in a "real war" that required societal militarization in order to defeat a dangerous insurgency. Abdel Qadr then took a subtle swipe at the Interior Ministry, suggesting that some national police forces (which he does not control) could eventually transition from a police to civil defense role and reduce their numbers, but he stood fast on keeping Army units at current strength. General Babakir also countered that many other countries had gendarmerie forces which were not necessarily counted as police, skewing the police-to-population ratio. Babakir added that the Iraqi military was already working towards development of highly-trained, specialized forces but this would take time. IntMin Bolani remained silent.

¶5. (S) Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I) Commander General Petraeus strongly cautioned the Prime Minister against making hasty reductions to ISF numbers, noting their requirements actually would increase as more Coalition Forces (CF) departed. He assessed that Iraq still did not have sufficient police and military to ensure security in the months and years ahead. He noted that al-Qaeda, JAM-SG, and criminals still posed a significant threat, even if greatly reduced by recent ISF campaigns. Concerning the economy and job creation, General Petraeus praised recent government efforts on electrical production which positively drove the Iraqi economy and suggested Maliki continue to focus attention on this critical resource, not transitioning ISF members until there were sufficient jobs for them.

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¶6. (S) The Prime Minister relented slightly and agreed that future troop and police reductions would depend on sustaining current security improvements, but he reiterated his strong desire for an eventual reduction in ISF forces.

MinDef vs. CHOD Redux

¶7. (S) Although presented to the NSC for study and consideration at next week's meeting, NSA Rubaie's short paper on the National Command and Control (C2) architecture re-ignited the long simmering dispute between MinDef Abdel Qadr and General Babakir over authority and command of Iraqi military forces. The MinDef emphasized that only he and the IntMin retained executive power over security forces as the executive agents of the Prime Minister. He pointedly added that the CHOD and police commanders act only in a consultant capacity, limited to advising, planning, and carrying out these executive orders.

¶8. (S) General Babakir, who went on an extended period of leave last summer after a similar dispute, questioned the legitimacy of the current structure without an executive order from the Prime Minister. Holding up the current command wiring diagram, the MinDef shot back, saying, "General, this is your chain of command." Not stopping there, Abdel Qadr stipulated that this command structure was put in place to ensure civilian control of the military and effectively prevent the possibility of a future coup d'etat by the uniformed military. This further infuriated Babakir, who began packing up and appeared on the verge of walking out of the meeting.

¶9. (S) Diffusing the tense situation, Prime Minister Maliki asked NSA Rubaie to take back the paper, confer with appropriate government ministries, and return it to the NSC with a complete set of recommendations. This should include, he said, consideration of the role of regional and provincial governments as well as their local command and control structures.

Targeting Judges

¶10. (S) The Iraqi Attorney General delivered a sobering report to the NSC noting seven attempted assassinations of Iraqi judges in one day. He warned that evidence strongly linked killings in recent years to various terrorist organizations and criminal gangs. He called upon the NSC to approve immediate actions to protect judges.

¶11. (S) General Petraeus assessed these attacks on judges could get worse as the JAM-SG criminal leadership returned from Iran. Prime Minister Maliki interrupted to express his belief that the SG threat was much weaker than that from al-Qaeda. General Petraeus countered that he was not as optimistic, observing that the government still could not adequately protect its judges against these threats nor bring known killers--like the former Deputy Minister of Health--to justice.

¶12. (S) The Ambassador stressed that these individual assaults on judges constituted an overall attack against the rule of law in Iraq. He urged the Maliki to take immediate action to secure judicial housing and increase the numbers of judicial police. The Ambassador emphasized that there were also serious systemic challenges. Protective details for judges were poorly trained, and the Higher Judicial Council does not have the capacity to run this vitally important program. The entire approach to judicial security should be examined and restructured.

¶13. (S) IntMin Bolani expressed his concern and promised two immediate actions: adding more security personnel/vehicles to judicial escorts and opening additional secure housing units. He said he was prepared to take additional steps, if necessary.

¶14. (S) Prime Minister Maliki took these suggestions on board and approved IntMin Bolani's plan to upgrade security for judicial escort details and provide additional housing in secured areas.

Stopping Terrorist Funding Sources

¶15. (S) Ministry of Defense Director General for Intelligence and Security gave a detailed briefing on AQI and JAM-SG

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funding sources compiled from over 60 Iraqi intelligence reports. He noted that funding for both groups had dried up within Iraq forcing them to seek alternative sources. In the case of AQI, he applauded international efforts against AQI's foreign bank accounts which he described as enormously successful. He reported that AQI has turned increasingly to stealing oil and oil products as their primary income source within Iraq. This provided an opportunity, he said, because the GOI could focus its counterinsurgency efforts on a relatively narrow income source.

¶16. (S) Concerning JAM-SG, the Director General concurred with General Petraeus' assessment on their current lack of funding sources within Iraq especially their loss of the Jamila market in Sadr City and the port of Umm Qasr. He likewise expected them to turn to external sources or criminal activities, especially as they returned from their self-imposed exile from Iran.

¶17. (S) MinDef Abdel Qadr concluded the discussion by requesting the Director General meet with planners at the Crisis Action Cell to develop actionable intelligence in response to this new information. He described the linking of intelligence with operations as a significant national challenge for the ISF, but one that had great potential to deal a serious blow to AQI and JAM-SG.
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